



Town of Natick

Summer 2015 Newsletter

*Issued by Martha L. White,
Town Administrator*

Natick Board of Selectmen

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Town of Natick, Massachusetts

13 East Central Street Natick, Massachusetts 01760

www.natickma.gov

2015 Spring Annual Town Meeting

Natick's Representative Town Meeting spent seven evenings debating and voting the 37 Articles on the 2015 Spring Annual Town Meeting Warrant.

In order to maintain good town services at a good value, Town Meeting approved the FY 2016 General Fund Operating Budget, totaling \$126,677,299 including \$53,817,355 for the Natick Public Schools (see "News from the Natick Public Schools" later in this Newsletter), \$1,247,313 for Keefe Tech Regional Vocational School, \$14,871,840 for Public Safety, \$6,899,573 for Public Works, \$7,982,317 for General Government Departments and Committees, \$2,090,345 for the Morse Institute Library, \$153,968 for the Bacon Free Library and \$39,614,588 for Shared Expenses, which includes employee benefits, debt costs, retirement costs and the Facility Management Department personnel and operational expenses. In addition, Town Meeting appropriated \$12,432,355 for Water/Sewer Enterprise Fund operations and \$909,910 for Sassamon Trace Golf Enterprise Fund operations.

Town Meeting also approved over \$4.5 million in support of capital equipment and improvements. The Operating and Capital Budgets can be found on the Town's website under Town Administrator.

This was a particularly challenging budget cycle. We began the budget balancing process in January with a \$3.5 million deficit driven largely by a projected 15% (\$1.9 million) increase in employee health care costs, a projected 8% (\$567,000+) increase in pension costs and a 7.5% (\$3.8 million) requested increase in the School Department budget, largely driven by significant enrollment growth. Ultimately, a 4.5% (\$2.3 million) School Department budget increase was agreed upon, and a balanced budget was presented to and approved by Town Meeting. Thank you, Town

Meeting members, for your support for the operating and capital budgets, as well as for other innovations and initiatives presented for your consideration.

News from the Natick Public Schools

The Natick Public Schools offers a sincere thank you to the Town of Natick for the overwhelming support at Town Meeting leading to the approval of our FY 2016 Budget. The new budget allows us to add some critically needed teaching positions that address our increasing student population. Our school system has faced rapid growth in student enrollment, particularly in the last nine years, during which time over 900 students have been added to the system. Looking forward, the school system is predicting to add an additional 100 students per year for the next decade.

In addition to adding staff positions, the FY 16 Budget allows the school system to execute part of our long range plan to deal with our space issues by adding six modular classrooms at Brown Elementary School. The next phase of that plan is to seek the renovation or build new of the Kennedy Middle School. The school system hopes to receive an invitation to partner with the Massachusetts School Building Authority in the fall to explore that project.

With increased staffing and additional educational space, the Natick Public Schools are primed to deliver another year of exceptional education to our over 5000 students.

Services and Savings Summary

We strive to address concerns of residents with limited means, so the Town recently mailed (and posted online) an updated list of savings and financial assistance programs.



FY 2014 Independent Audit

Chris Rogers, of the auditing firm CliftonLarsonAllen recently presented their audit of the fiscal year 2014 to the Board of Selectmen. Board Chairman Charles Hughes noted that this was the best audit he's ever seen! Rogers praised Natick's financial team, characterizing it as one of the strongest in the state. Led by Jeff Towne, Deputy Town Administrator/Finance Director, the team includes Ginny Cahill, Comptroller; Jan Dangelo, Director of Assessing; Steven Price, Treasurer/Collector, and several knowledgeable and capable support personnel. Management of Town finances is a responsibility that we do not take lightly. I am very grateful to this team for their dedication and good work. In fact, we recently learned that Standard and Poor's has affirmed the Town's AAA bond rating, the highest possible for the June 2015 bond issuance. Great work team!

Anticipated Eversource Electricity Rate Reduction

As has recently been reported, Eversource (formerly NSTAR) has filed a request with the Department of Public Utilities to reduce their Basic Service electric rates effective July 1, 2015 through December 31, 2015, bringing the Eversource residential rate below the Natick Community Choice Electricity Supply Program rate during that period. The anticipated Eversource summer rate is 10.05 cents per kWh whereas the Community Choice rate is fixed at 13.32 cents through December 31, 2016.

We recognize that the lower Eversource rate may be cause for concern among residents. Through the Community Choice Program the average resident saved about \$75 for the period January 1 through June 30, 2015. However, for the ensuing six-month period, the average resident is expected to pay approximately \$130 more through the Community Choice Program, as compared to the anticipated Eversource rate.

However, the Community Choice Program's fixed price protects Natick customers from the uncertainty of market volatility. While participants can opt out of the Program at any time at no cost, they will not be able to return at the current program price. Instead, returning customers will receive a market-based price at the time they rejoin the program and would be subject to the volatility of this market, in which high winter rates are anticipated for several years.



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Our goal through this program has always been provide stable and predictable rates, save residents money and educate them about the choices they have regarding their electricity supplier. Accordingly, we have initiated discussions with ConEdison Solutions to negotiate contract price modifications in response to Eversource's summer rate. We will release information to the local media and through the Town's website as soon as it is available, to help residents make an informed decision as to whether to stay with the Community Choice Program or opt out.

Transportation Updates

MassDOT opened bids for the new Marion Street ("Tilly Ciccarielli") bridge on June 9; the contract should be awarded within 60-90 days. The estimated completion date will be determined at that time.

The Kansas Street project should be complete as you read this. On Friday, July 10 at 10:30 a.m. Kansas Street will be rededicated as General Green Avenue in honor of the former commander of the Natick Soldier Systems Command Center, Major General Harold J. Greene, who was killed in August 2014 while on active military service in Afghanistan. The public is invited.

The Oak Street/Route 9 intersection project has been delayed by utility company wire and pole relocation, and is expected to be complete this fall.

Staff Updates

DPW Deputy Director and Supervisor of Equipment Maintenance **Tom Collins** was recently honored as one of the Top 10 Public Works Officials by the American Public Works Association. Congratulations Tom on this prestigious award!

After serving as Executive Assistant to the Board of Selectmen for over 30 years, **Donna Challis** recently retired. We wish Donna many happy and relaxing years, and welcome to this position **Donna Donovan**, who comes to us with significant prior municipal experience. We also recently welcomed **Shawn McGoldrick** to the position of Assistant Comptroller. Shawn has been part of the team conducting our annual independent audit so arrived already familiar with our systems and personnel. In April, **James Errickson** began work as our new Director of Community and Economic Development. Jamie's experience and skills are a perfect match for the Natick's development and planning challenges and opportunities.